

Running head: DEVELOPING STUDENT LEADERS

Tomorrow's Change Agents:

Developing the Student Leaders of Today

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Abstract

Today's high school students find themselves in a complex world in which they take on many different roles. They are multitaskers and technocrats, artisans and up-and-coming entrepreneurs, loyal friends and potential world-changers. However, do these students know how to deal with the opportunities presented before them? Often, they are graduated from their high schools and colleges without significant training in navigating the paths set before them or without the knowledge that someone believes in them. As such, teacher and school leaders must answer the call and set about the task of raising up student leaders to use their gifts, talents, and abilities to inspire vision, collaborate with peers, and practice servant leadership.

## Introduction

Much is said in educational circles about the “leaders of the tomorrow.” As teacher and school leaders, we idealistically enter our classrooms and school settings with the hopes of motivating our students to learn and grow in their intended pursuits. However, if this growth remains within the classroom walls, or if students do not see a practical application of growth in a life outside of high school, then we as teacher and school leaders have failed. As such, this paper will focus on the development of student leaders within the high school community. The inclusion of the word “community” in the previous sentence presupposes the idea that community is in fact important in nurturing leadership traits within students, and I intend to examine that relationship. This paper is also part of fulfilling the requirements for the EAD 801 Leadership and Organizational Development online course.

## Background and Rationale

The students in our classrooms today will be the ones making tomorrow’s decisions. They will influence matters of healthcare, the economy, private and public education, the environment, and government policy. They will be the ones running small businesses, Fortune 500 companies, and nonprofit organizations. Our students will make choices with ramifications on every city and county in this nation. Some will even have the privilege of being an influential voice in world affairs. The following questions are then raised. Under what framework will our students make the decisions required by them? Are we, as teacher and school leaders, adequately doing our part to prepare our students to lead amidst the challenges that tomorrow’s increasingly globalized context will bring? Or, do we recklessly assume that leadership is always innate: that some “have it” and others do not? If we do not take such questions into

account, we as teacher and school leaders, run the risk of limiting our students' growth and leadership potential to the four walls of a classroom and nothing more.

Three years ago, I began work as a middle school English teacher for a K-12 private school located in the heart of north Miami. Our location presents us with the unique benefits and challenges of education within an ever-growing multicultural, urban context. Two years ago, our recently promoted head administrator called for the formation of a student leadership program to help interested students make a voice for themselves in the increasing myriad of complex social and cultural situations and problems that were laid out before them. He called upon me and three other teachers to assist him in tackling this program and creating a sustainable curriculum. While I believe our first attempts were admirable in their efforts, I also believe we have fallen short of our goal to inspire students to be leaders and to think critically about the issues around them. What has happened instead is the creation of leadership-oriented classes that, while good in and of themselves, do not fit an overall goal or theme to the program. In short, there is no cohesion or overall vision to cultivate student leadership skills.

Earlier this semester, my administrator asked me to take over the program, beginning in the 2009-2010 school year. As part of the preparation for my new role, I have decided to focus my research for this project on aspects of student leadership and how high schools can contribute to the development of effective student leaders within their particular communities.

### Research Questions

Extensive material has been written about leadership in general, with far less in comparison dedicated to successful student leadership. As such, my primary research question is the following:

- What factors contribute to the rise of successful and effective student leaders within high schools and their surrounding communities?

In addition, my research will also focus on the following sub-questions:

- What factors hinder the growth of student leaders?
- What elements lead to a successful student leadership program within a high school?
- How have student leaders positively manifested their leadership skills by serving in their high schools and in their local communities?
- What role do teacher leaders play in inspiring student leaders to take action?
- How does community involvement, from parents to local leaders, affect student leaders?
- How and when does moral purpose come into play into the change initiatives for student leaders?

Through the exploration of these questions, it is my hope that teacher and school leaders will be persuaded to encourage their students into leadership roles that will make for a beneficial impact on the student, his or her school, and the surrounding community, all the while knowing that today's student leaders will be tomorrow's change agents.

### Methodology

My research is comprised primarily of limited review of literature, from both books and scholarly articles. This data was gathered from a variety of sources. Some are practitioners who have experience with leadership in business models; others are individuals who write about leadership more generally. In addition, some sources focus on aspects of leadership within

educational systems, and other sources still focus on educational leadership with regard to students.

Moreover, I conducted two interviews with educational leaders who have experience with student leadership programs. The first interview focused on the Head of School for the aforementioned K-12 private school in north Miami who felt compelled to begin a student leadership program at his school two years ago. During his interview, this administrator discussed some of the challenges faced by schools intent on developing student leaders. The second interview gathered the insights of a very successful teacher in Clarkston, Michigan, who has developed a thriving student leadership program. This teacher shared some of his understanding on how student leadership can be fostered at the high school level.

I then looked to internet resources, especially those focusing on student leadership programs currently in existence. This includes LeadAmerica and the Student Leadership Institute. Finally, I made note of my own observations of and conversations with student leaders within my particular school setting and the factors that discourage students from stepping into leadership roles.

Based on my research, I intend to establish *why* student leadership is important and what factors make the concept of student leadership work. I will then focus on factors that encourage and hinder the growth of student leadership, while also looking at the aspects of a successful student leadership program within the framework of a high school setting.

### Review of Related Literature

In the following section, I spend some time highlighting the major themes found in my literature review. Although a great deal is said about leadership, I have chosen to break my

review into three sub-questions to better investigate how this idea of leadership relates to high school students through a selected study of works on leadership in general and student leadership in particular. The sub-questions are as follows:

- Successful leadership traits
- Servant leadership and moral purpose
- Relationship building and community involvement

### *Successful Leadership Traits in Student Leaders*

When identifying positive traits in successful leaders, perhaps the most important quality that leaders have is the ability to recognize that leadership is not simply an offering bestowed upon the lucky few, leaving the rest to blindly follow. Rather, more and more of the available research is suggesting that leadership capacities can be nurtured and advanced. When analyzing the corporate setting, executive consultant Judith E. Glaser (2006) notes that while two companies may have equal resources and staff, the company's environment has a greater effect on the production and productivity of leaders within the company. In *The Student Leadership Guide*, Brendon Burchard takes Glaser's principle a step further and states confidently that "[Everyone has] the personal power to become a great leader. Leadership abilities reside in all of us" (Burchard, 2008, p. 12). This idea is echoed once more through the voices of James Kouzes and Barry Posner, who maintain that "leadership is *an observable set of skills and abilities* that are useful in any campus, community, or work setting" (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 145). The views of these three authors serve to remind us as teacher and school leaders that all students are capability of exerting leadership abilities. However, in order for students to grasp hold of their leadership abilities, the myth that leaders are "born and not made" must be dispelled

with conviction. It then becomes a responsibility of teacher and school leaders to create opportunities that will cultivate these abilities in our students.

Secondly, student leaders are visionaries who inspire others to make positive change. Certainly, the term *visionary* is not a discriminating term, reserved only for statesmen or big-business CEOs. Instead, visionaries simply articulate a “compelling picture for the future” and create an atmosphere conducive to engaging others and sustaining this picture (Cameron & Green, 2008, p.48). Over the years, school-age students have proven themselves more than capable of assuming the role of a visionary. An episode from Colombian history teaches us this very fact.

In 1996, Colombia saw itself as a center of war and poverty. With guerilla groups gaining control over the populace, many began to see the situation as hopeless. However, the students of Colombia refused to take matters silently. Groups of students aged nine to fifteen from hostile areas came together for peace rallies, worked with local governments, and were trained to help other terrorized children. Their efforts culminated in a special election to vote on a bill of rights specifically designed for Colombian children and to promote peace. Over 2.7 million students from the ages of seven to eighteen showed up for election day, sending a strong message those in charge (Senge, 2000). These students let their adult counterparts know that they too had a vision for their country, a vision of peace and unity. The lesson in Colombia serves to show that even at young ages, students can perceive complex situations and collectively work to bring about positive change for the future.

*Servant Leadership and Moral Purpose*

Simply put, servant leadership puts others first (Buchard, 2008). This concept is almost difficult to imagine in today's self-centric youth culture, where a majority of popular films, musicians, and advertisements are telling teenagers that it is the teenager's wants and desires that are of principal importance. With this in mind, how can student leaders inspire others to share their vision? James Kouzes and Barry Posner have proposed that the solution is as simple as modeling the way. They write that "exemplary student leaders *set the example* through daily actions that demonstrate they are deeply committed to their beliefs" (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 12). In short, they explain, leaders live up to that age-old adage and practice what they preach (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Servant leadership here is key, for if students are to be visionaries who inspire others for positive change, they will be most effective if they can prove that positive change is, in fact, accessible. Leadership professionals Burt Nanus and Stephen M. Dobbs address this characteristic with regard to nonprofit organizations, noting that effective leaders have "paid their dues and earned the right to lead" (Nanus & Dobbs, 1999, p. 25). Concerned students aspiring to leadership roles might then wonder from where servant leadership flows. The question is answered easily, as student leaders will quickly realize that true servant leadership emanates from a solid grounding in moral purpose.

Effective leaders cannot work without moral purpose. University professor Michael Fullan defines moral purpose as "acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (Fullan, 2001, p. 3). If, then, servant leaders are to enact change within a community, they must do so under a moral framework or standard. Famed leadership expert Stephen Covey made a name for himself with his *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. However, upon further reflection, he realized that more was needed to fill the equation. This led to the publishing of Covey's *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit: From*

*Effectiveness to Greatness*, which encourages individuals to find their voice and inspire others to do the same. At the end of *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*, Covey discusses the relationship between moral authority and servant leadership, noting not only that “moral authority is *primary greatness* (character strengths)” but also that “moral dominion is achieved through servanthood, service, and contribution” (Covey, 2005, p. 299).

This relationship, then, clearly manifests itself with the understanding that moral purpose is derived from a sense of humility. Of course, any honest observer would note that this idea runs counter to our natural instincts; there are times we as human beings really just do not feel like helping out our fellow man. Consequently, then, student leaders driven by a moral purpose must turn to a word not popularly spoken of these days – *sacrifice*. Covey urges that we rise above this temptation toward selfishness and explains that sacrifice is key to the fulfillment of moral purpose (Covey, 2005). What, then, will student leaders be asked to sacrifice? Perhaps money will come into play, but more than likely, student leaders will be asked to sacrifice their *time*, willingly and even joyfully for advancement of positive change within a school or within the local community. As teacher and school leaders, we must be diligent in modeling the inextricable tie between servant leadership and moral purpose so that student leaders in turn can do the same. In the end, moral purpose is disciplined, it is not arbitrary, and it is a very real choice that all of us will be asked to make.

### *Relationship Building and Community Involvement*

After years of study, countless leadership researchers from a wide variety of vocational fields have reached at least one conclusion – leadership does not grow out of a void. In order for student leaders to truly be successful, they must have the support of those around them. Brendon

Burchard warns against the tendency to categorize individuals as leaders and followers. Instead, he suggested that individuals move to the word “collaborator” and look to “communities of shared responsibility and accountability” (Burchard, 2008, p. 27). Of course, community building cannot take place without a strong foundation of genuine relationship building. Michael Fullan (2001) acknowledges the importance of genuine relationships to leadership training, devoting an entire chapter to the concept in his *Leading in a Culture of Change* and recognizing that positive relationships with school and community stakeholders will make the difference in the success of a particular venture. When student leaders can trust one another, they pave the way for remarkable results, and as Kouzes and Posner note, “trust begets trust” (Kouzes and Posner, 2008, p. 100).

The concept of servant leadership crops up once more as student leaders begin to devote more time to their local communities. Anne Wescott Dodd and Jean L. Konzal write with conviction that “students play an important role in school change efforts” (Dodd and Konzal, 2002, p. 157). Student leadership skills are enhanced as students engage in what Dodd and Konzal have termed “service learning.” Through service learning, students take hold of initiative, applying and presenting their classroom knowledge to local officials who may be able to use the students’ information to solve community problems (Dodd and Konzal, 2002). In addition, community involvement enables student leaders to see the fruit of their actions and to know that someone, somewhere, has been helped through their efforts.

Even more so, the student leader *needs* a leader. We as teacher and school leaders must never underestimate the soaring potential of our students, but we must also remember that at the end of the day, our students are still fifteen and sixteen-year-old kids who are dealing with broken homes, mounting pressures from schools, the daunting prospects of standardized tests and

colleges looming on the horizon, and the inescapable task of trying to figure out one's place in the world. As a result, Burchard (2008) writes passionately about the need for students to be guided and inspired by their teachers, men and women who can make that one difference in child's life simply by believing in him or her. The sad truth is that many students spend more time in their schools than in their own homes. With an average of 180 days per school year, students generally spend at least 1260 hours in their teachers' care. Sometimes, a teacher's kind word may be the only encouragement a student receives. Consequently, teacher and school leaders must be diligent about building professional relationships with students, nurturing and fostering a student leader's growth. Why? If we are honest with ourselves, we know that the one student slouching down and sitting in the back of the class could very well be the change agent of tomorrow, if only someone were to believe in him or her.

### Findings & Conclusions

The study of leadership can, at times, be a demanding ambition. Some men and women have devoted their whole lives to this inquiry, writing book after book about the subject. Many researchers coincide with one another in their findings; others may disagree on definitions or practical approaches to leadership, whether in the corporate arena, educational domain, or in some other, more specified field. For the purposes of this paper, I have explored concepts of leadership as they might apply to high school students. I have attempt to dissect a limited review of literature and internet resources, hearing not only from well-known researchers, but also from colleagues who have recognized the need to raise up student leaders and have forged ahead with student leadership in their respective school districts. Although I may only have scratched the

surface of the available research, I do believe that I have uncovered several significant findings that can bring us school and teacher leaders a better understanding of student leadership.

First, perhaps one of the most significant findings from this particular study is the suggestion that leadership is not innate. History has shown that men and women are often thrust into situations that call for a leader to rise. These individuals did not always ask for such a position. Rather, they recognized a need and stepped in to offer their services. It is tempting to hear an articulate speaker or a polished orator and subsequently believe that only those with the ability to conduct such a discourse are qualified to be considered “leaders.” In a high school setting, we teachers do ourselves and our students a great disservice when we incorrectly assume that only those most “outgoing” have leadership capabilities. Rather, we must realize that all of our students are ripe with leadership potential; sometimes even the most introverted student only needs a little push or encouragement before embarking on great ventures. The first step, then, to unleashing this potential is to help students garner a sense of what they “stand for, believe in, and hope for” (Burchard, 2008, p. 110). The intent here is not necessarily one of persuasion of others, but instead *inspiration*. In a sense, students must spend a little time in self-assessment, analyzing their main beliefs, trustworthiness, and future goals, to name a few (Burchard 2008). James Kouzes and Barry Posner also note the following:

Research shows that the people most frequently mentioned as admired leaders all had strong beliefs about matters of principle, an unwavering commitment to a clear set of values, and passion about their causes. The lesson is clear: the leaders who are admired most are those who believe strongly in something and are willing to stand up for their beliefs. (Kouzes and Posner, 2008, p. 30)

Once students have the opportunity to set their core beliefs in place, they have set a strong foundation for their personal leadership growth.

Another important finding is the importance of collaboration in any leadership venture, especially when mixing students into the equation. Many times, high school students are at an age where they are told what to do. They are instructed to arrive to school on time, study for their tests, complete projects, and never commit the unpardonable sin of not turning in homework. One wonders how often they are allowed to experience a collaborative process that results in any kind of lasting change. When students collaborate with one another on any particular venture, they are given opportunity to create shared visions, which make for a smoother road in any leadership process (Dodd, 120).

Of course, this form of collaboration does not mean simply with others students. As teachers, we must stress to students that schools are not islands unto themselves. Instead, schools should be a thriving part of the local community, a place where students are taught to invest in and do their part in the surrounding neighborhoods. Aspiring student leaders should be given a chance to forge relationships with local city leaders and create a sense of ownership not only within their schools but also within their communities. This type of collaboration means that students do not sit idly while the world passes by. Rather, students get up, see life outside of their carefully constructed schemas, and begin serving others.

One thinks of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. in the 1960s. No doubt most would rightly hail Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as the face of the movement, but even King himself knew that the task set before him could not be achieved singularly. In *Why We Can't Wait*, he chronicles the civil rights struggles up through the 1960s and writes of well-planned and tightly coordinated non-violent measures of resistance to the current status quo. He talks of individuals,

*young* and old, working together to bring true freedom to all men and women, no matter what race or creed. In fact, he even notes that several of the major sit-ins were organized and carried out by none other than students (King, 2000). Dr. King recognized an important truth in his years in Birmingham – real and lasting change can only be achieved through honest collaboration, times when individuals begin to think beyond themselves and work in conjunction to resolve a need or improve a situation.

Of course, no investigation into student leadership would be complete without a brief analysis of obstacles that may crop up along the way. Brendon Burchard (2008) identifies three major hindrances for aspiring student leaders, the most daunting of which is fear. This fear could manifest itself in a variety of ways – fear of failure, nervous anxiety, a fear of rejection or embarrassment, and so on. These are natural emotions that will occasionally rise in the life of any high school student, but it is imperative that students not only address their fears but also see the danger in dwelling on these different types of fears. In fact, Jay Strack of the Student Leadership Institute encourages students to see potential problems “not as obstacles or objects but as opportunities” (Strack, 2006, p. 61). Once students realize that they can learn from and overcome their fears, all of which have no doubt been shared by their classmates at one time or another, they have grown their leadership acuity.

Secondly, another danger to those pursuing leadership is the idea that leaders simply manage people. We often think of those in management positions as leaders, but this is not necessarily the case. The acting “boss” of a venture may be able to give orders, but he or she may not possess the guiding philosophies, shared visions, and willingness to collaborate that leaders must embody in order to generate success. High school students should know that it is not a title that makes one a leader, but rather one’s ability to influence, through “knowledge,

skills, character, abilities, personality, and [his or her] relationships” (Burchard, 2008, p. 29).

Leaders do not achieve progress because they ordered people about; leaders get results because they have the ability to inspire others to their shared vision.

Finally, student need also realize the value of self-reflection. When leaders do not stop to reflect on their passions, goals, and current projects, they run the risk of overlooking potential problem areas or ways to improve. Even more problematic, without self-reflection, student leaders can easily raise the beast that so eagerly tramples upon genuine humility – arrogance. When student leaders become arrogant in their accomplishments, forgetting the collaborative efforts that helped achieve a particular aim, they lose sight of what is most important and can endanger the leadership venture they initially set out so eagerly upon.

### Implications

The implications of the development of student leaders are huge and should be taken into consideration in every high school in the country. If, as presupposed at the start of this paper, we are daily interacting with tomorrow’s change agents, then we as teacher and school leaders must make every effort to cultivate the leadership potential within every student we are given opportunity to share with. In short, we must put theory into practice.

To start, the findings in this paper have furthered my convictions that every high school needs to develop some program or outlet that encourages students to take up the mantle of leadership. More importantly, this program should not be haphazardly thrown together, but it should instead be intentional and focused in its operations, headed up by teachers who believe in the power of student leadership. Once a program is in order, teachers and interested students should come together and use the available research to inform working vision and core value

statements for the program. The vision and core value statements can be flexible to start, but as the program begins to find its footing, teachers and students should be able to revisit the vision and core value statements, ready to evaluate their effectiveness and practicality.

At my K-12 private school, we as teachers have recently begun the task of formulating a vision statement and core values for our fledgling student leadership program. The vision statement and core values are as follows:

The Student Leadership Institute (SLi) exists to train students to be Christian thinkers and communicators. We also seek to prepare students to engage culture by developing a Biblical worldview. The Student Leadership Institute is built on the following core values:

- ✓ Personal Christian growth
- ✓ Servant leadership
- ✓ Community-building
- ✓ Evangelism

Before the present school year ends, students will be encouraged to work together in drafting their own mission and vision statements. Then, this current vision statement and its subsequent core values will be presented to SLi student members for discussion and deliberation. We believe that giving students a voice on a vision statement and core values for their program will be the first step in teaching one of leadership's most important subsidiaries – collaboration.

This, of course, raises the following question: how does the intertwined relationship of genuine leadership and collaboration play out at the high school level? Students may participate in after-school clubs or sports, but one wonders what school opportunities really allow students a chance to play a significant role in the direction of their activities. Perhaps the most common

response would be to look to the structure of a student council, an organizational unit within a high school that presumably encourages students to take on leadership roles. Of course, these roles can vary dramatically from school to school or district to district, but usually, student councils are carried out through an elective process whereby students run for various offices, such as president, vice president, and so on, and once elected, take on whatever responsibilities proffered to them by teachers or administrators. However, based on my research, I must conclude that this particular style of forming a student council is not conducive to building genuine leadership skills, for elections lend to the idea of leaders and followers, an idea that Brendon Burchard (2008) warns against.

With respect to this topic, then, I engaged in several informative discussions with a highly qualified teacher out of Clarkson, Michigan, who has built a successful student leadership program in his school. He believes with conviction that student councils should not be election-based but rather assembled through an application and interview process. He has found that when students do not hold an elective office, they are more naturally inclined to develop a sense of teamwork and shoulder the responsibilities of leadership more equally. In addition, he noted that the concept of student officers only “reinforces hierarchies and people gunning for titles, not responsibilities.” His convictions about the importance of student leaders and especially that of a student council have pushed me to begin a student leadership council of a similar format at my own school. This leadership council exists to train students in the art of leadership by giving them a forum to develop those skills.

Although the student council is a start, more can be done. I have since reached out to one of the city commissioners in my district, offering the services of myself and our interested students in ways that can serve the local community. Next, we can connect with organizations

like LeadAmerica.org and the Student Leadership University, two groups that offer tremendous opportunities for students seeking to broaden their perspectives on leadership. In addition, we need to make time for continual self-assessment, addressing problems as they arise and meeting challenges head-on. Finally, we must always practice servant leadership. As a Christian school, we believe that this idea of servant leadership and sacrifice was modeled in perfection by Jesus Christ. Though we humbly realize that we will not always succeed, we seek to imitate this model of servant leadership to the best of our abilities.

### Summary

When I first embarked upon this project, I began with a wearied sigh. Here was yet another paper due about some sort of educational theory. I had been there, and I had most certainly done that. I knew a tremendous amount of reading would be involved, coupled with many hours of work, and I was a bit skeptical as to the practicality of the project. It did not take long for me to realize, however, how very, very wrong I was. This research study has been one of the most informative, interesting, and applicable tasks I have undertaken in my graduate career.

My views about student leadership have been completely transformed as a result of this project. They have been sharpened and clarified, and the more I learn, the more I realize how much left there is to learn. The learnings I encountered in my research have not stopped with the completion of this paper. In fact, buoyed by my newfound and surprisingly concerned interest in this topic, I have found myself continually searching online for new books or resources on student leadership; I am currently gathering a few books on the subject that will comprise my own personal reading list for the summer.

I am genuinely excited about the student leadership possibilities for my school and in my new role as the Student Leadership Director, I want to make the program as effective as possible. Not only am I excited, but I want to generate that same excitement in my students. I want to see them become passionate and ardent leaders in their areas of influence, and if they leave my school, I want them to take that passion with them and multiply it with those around them. I want to see them take ownership of their schools and communities. In short, I want to give the student leaders of today as much as I can to enable them to become tomorrow's change agents.

### New Questions

With any research venture, more questions are bound to surface, and this particular study on developing student leaders was no exception. As my research began to take shape, new matters of inquiry arose, usually relating to some specific nature of my research. Due to the limited nature of my research and its informal approach, I was unable to address all issues that presented themselves during the course of my inquiry. However, I have taken note of such issues to attend to later this summer. I know that exploring these concerns will contribute to a fuller understanding of student leadership and its possible applications. In particular, the following questions have caused me to pause and reflect on the outcomes at any attempt at modeling leadership for students.

- Could there be a flexible rubric or survey to help gauge student perceptions about their personal transformations as a leader?
- What training activities can be employed to help teach students leadership traits?

- How can the student leadership program at the K-12 private school in north Miami inspire students to continue giving back to their communities even after graduation?

I intend to devote a portion of my summer vacation to finding answers to these queries. I do so, however, knowing that these answers will no doubt lead to further questions.

### Interviews

This final portion of the paper focuses on two interviews. This first centers on the Head of School for the previously mentioned K-12 private school in Miami and his thoughts on the importance of and challenges deriving from beginning a student leadership program.

#### **Q. Why is student leadership important?**

I believe leadership is both a trait and something to be learned. Those who are natural leaders need guidance as to how to use that ability. Those who are not need to understand that there will be areas in their life that they will need to take on a leadership role and be effective. Most importantly, it is vitally important that leadership training be a foundation stone of every curriculum for the simple fact that leaders change and rule the world.

#### **Q. What prompted you to begin a student leadership program?**

I see the connection between what students are taught in school and what they eventually become in society. Also I realized that the curriculum as a whole did not focus on those “other” skills that are essential for success such as integrity, patience, perseverance, etc. Since students are largely are product of their

environment, I wanted to create an environment that not only encourages but produces student leaders.

**Q. What response did you initially receive to your student leadership program?**

Resentment from the students and some of the teachers. It was challenging to communicate its importance, because it was such a new concept and it interrupted “the way things were.”

**Q. What factors encouraged the growth of student leaders in your school?**

It starts with the top—that is, the school’s leadership—understanding the indispensability of a viable program that trains students in areas that are not emphasized in the traditional curriculum. The importance of the leadership program must flow directly from and/or support the school’s overall mission, vision, and core values statements. The school’s leadership must communicate the importance the leadership program to the teachers and the teachers must translate that importance to each student. Growth does start from the top, but it is cultivated with each teacher.

**Q. How has your student leadership program manifested positive results both within and outside of your school?**

Just recently I have seen the students become more interested in the program. Sad to say, some of the students who were less interested in the program this past year are now gone. The program will be a success when the students finally understand the why behind the what. It is too soon to tell how this program is

going to transform these students into dynamic community leaders. However, it does seem the seed—the importance of student leadership—is beginning to germinate within a good portion of our students.

This second interview garners the views of the aforementioned teacher and student leadership director from Clarkston, Michigan. As an educator well-practiced in the art of student leadership, this teacher shares some of his insights.

**Q. Why is student leadership important?**

It's a practical education that focuses on the aspects of professional and personal life that center on communication and organizational skill. It demands adult standards of teens and pushes them beyond the ceiling and limitations youth often impose on themselves (and that we as a society often accept). It requires them to exceed expectations and to create much higher goals for themselves as people.

**Q. What prompted you to begin a student leadership program?**

Being interested in activities, service, and leadership as a student in various sports, clubs, and groups as a student, I always valued the lessons I learned from hands-on and experiential activities. I also saw the need for students to take ownership of their school/community and take on the responsibility to help others reach new heights. In college, I was involved in an intensive leadership/training scholarship program and I further saw the value it had on me, my peers, and our university. With both of those factors in place and with looking to create

something unique and positive as a teacher, I thought this program would help my students and school excel and grow in ways unlike any other school experience.

**Q. What response did you initially receive to your student leadership program?**

When I took over the Student Council class, all grades were in it. There was also a Leadership class that had all grades in it. There was a real have and have not mentality amongst the kids. After a struggle with bad attitudes my first year and knowing I needed to create something better, I devised the program set up as it is today. I feel like I weeded out the kids that were there for the credit alone. I also went out and recruited diverse kids and open some kids' eyes to the possibility of what they could do. There has been no greater social/community headache I have ever had in my career, but there is nothing that I am prouder and happier that I have done. In the last four/five years, the idea has blossomed and really created a more inclusive approach to school leadership and has spread into different corners and aspects of our school community. The kids get it now and the standard of acceptance and diverse personalities is something they all value and join for and to learn about. Our staff is even being more inclusive with one another and different students. Parents are very supportive of it because it is a group that works to create equal value and good experiences in a myriad of ways for a myriad of kids.

**Q. What factors hindered the growth of student leaders in your school?**

This is a credit to my bosses because I have had almost total freedom to create

this Program and to expand it. They trust me (thankfully) and because the cause is a noble one with the entire school's needs in mind, people stand behind it. At first, it was hard to get awareness and recruitment going. For example, my sophomore leadership class only had 17 the 2nd year and 19 the 3rd year. However, this year we had enough applicants for two sections of the class. Budget issues in scheduling limited me to only one section though and I had to cut half of the students who applied. That's the only limitation I can see. A group of qualified really great kids won't get to be in the class, so my job is to help them find ways to get involved besides the LEAD I course.

**Q. How has your student leadership program manifested positive results both within and outside of your school?**

Examples:

- Increased inclusive atmosphere and sense of personal value across a wide range of students
- Created stronger connections between school and community and families
- Provides funding/resources for students in need in various ways
- Provides funding for both educational and spirit programming
- Provides support for staff and classroom needs
- Give students unique and diverse personal experiences that help them grow as people and professionals
- Creates stronger bonds amongst student body as well as the staff
- Helps students learn to deal with differences and personalities in productive and

bonding ways

- Created a go-to student task force for community, district, and family groups in Clarkston

From these two interviews, I have gleaned some very important facts. First, beginning a new student leadership program is no easy task. Teacher and school leaders should be prepared to meet the challenge of jaded students, belligerent parents, or stubborn colleagues when trying to inspire vision. It is also clear that the launching of a student leadership program is made much more viable when administrators are on board with the project and encourage support from the top. Finally, lest we be discouraged by all the potential obstacles mounting in our way, the educator from Michigan reminds us that perseverance to such a worthy cause as student leadership is well worth it and that the results can have a myriad of positive, lasting effects in the school, its local community, and most importantly, in the lives of our students.

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